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ABSTRACT

In the United States, early childhood educators are confronted with a chaotic "non-system" of preservice and in-service employment education requirements. Within this non-system, teachers and caregivers who work most autonomously, and have the most extensive responsibilities for the greatest number of hours with the youngest and most vulnerable children, must meet the fewest and least stringent requirements. Research and experience suggest that a systematic plan of personnel development should be implemented. This plan should include five tiers of activity: (1) in-service training and orientation for entry level personnel; (2) training and education during service for teachers and caregivers concerned with improving their teaching skills; (3) professional education and credentialing in 4- or 5-year programs; (4) specialist preparation for professionals ready to assume leadership roles; and (5) senior leadership preparation for leaders of the profession. Each tier of activity is related in part to the stages of professional development that Karen VanderVen (1988) has suggested, and in part to traditional ideas of academic program levels. All parts of the five-tier system exist, to some degree, throughout the country. What is lacking is unification, modification, and funding commitment. Concluding discussion covers ways in which the tier system might be used to increase the number of qualified personnel, particularly minority group members. (RH)

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Current Issues and Future Needs In Staff Training*

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Introduction

We live in a contradictory world. In the Fall 1988 Issue of the High Scope Resource we read the following:

The early childhood field is expanding rapidly. And we--the practitioners, administrators, and support staff who constitute the early childhood profession--are receiving intense scrutiny from parents, service providers, educators, legislators, policy makers, and the business community, all of whom have a stake in the future of young children and hence in their present quality of life....

These various stakeholders are telling us something many of us may not have realized: we have arrived. We are professionals engaged in an important profession. (Greene & Hohmann, 1988).

It's a nice thought, but a doubtful reality. It is much discussed (c.f. Spodek, Saracho, & Peters) but contradicted by all recent salary surveys (NAEYC, 1984; Child Care Information Exchange, 1985; Willer, 1987).

The issues of staff training are equally contradictory.

It is generally agreed that teacher/ caregiver training specifically related to child development and early education is essential. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that the behavioral requirements for working in early childhood settings demand it. Functioning effectively in settings that have organizational autonomy, that serve a highly diverse clientele, that are socially complex, and that place the individual in a position of relative isolation from other colleagues requires continuous professional judgement based on an accurate understanding of children's needs and the best practices for meeting those needs. Yet, in the United States, we retain a chaotic "non-system" of preservice and inservice employment education requirements. Within this "non-system" those who work most autonomously and have the most extensive responsibilities (health, welfare and education) for the greatest number of hours daily and yearly, with the youngest and most vulnerable children must meet the fewest and least stringent requirements.

Further, where education or training standards are set by certification, credentialing or regulatory authority they usually a) are arbitrary (X number of hours or credit hours of training without any assurance of the content or level of understanding of the trainee), b) are retrospective (a reflection of training or education received sometime in the past without concern for what the person knows or can do now), c) bear little relation to the specific employment level, clientele or setting, d) permit little room for individual differences and e) with some notable

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exceptions, show little relation to actual successful performance. (Peters, Cohen & McNichol, 1974).

Our efforts address the issue is complicated by three further issues:

First, the demands of the field for new workers and professionals far exceeds our capability to train and educate such persons--particularly as new kinds of specialists are needed (as for example in response to P.L. 99-457).

Second, there is the incredible turnover rate among the lowest pay and education level workers (estimated to range between 36% and 62% annually for day care centers and family day care homes respectively--though some would consider even these to be low estimates). Such turnover rates place into question the viability of many preservice training options and create an enormous demand for the continuous availability of some type of training.

Third, the training and education routes that we know work best, that create horizontal and vertical career mobility, and are most likely to lead to higher salaries, fringe benefits and employment stability are the very ones that most often exclude what has been called the "educationally disenfranchised"--poor and minorities. (Peters, 1988) Indeed, it is a curious thing that at the very time we have an increasing demand for qualified early childhood teachers and administrators, and when the numbers of minority students entering educational fields is decreasing, our major educational institutions are considering or putting into place requirements that will require five years of formal education with all the direct and indirect expenses involved. Doing so perpetuates a two class system of early childhood education in this country and an underclass of low level child care workers who seem destined to remain below the poverty line.

The greatest irony, however, lies in the fact that we know how to do it better.

The Five Tier System

Our research and experience suggest that if we are to develop a truly professional field and actually protect and enhance children's short-term and long-term well-being, we need to institute a systematic plan of personnel development that includes five tiers of activity (See Figure 1).

The five tiers are:

1. Inservice Training and Orientation,
2. During Service Training and Education,
3. Professional Education and Credentialing,
4. Specialist Preparation,
5. Senior Leadership Preparation.

Each of these tiers of activity relates to the stages of professional development that Karen VanderVen (1988) has suggested and in part to traditionally thought of academic program levels.

Inservice Training and Orientation.

The current demand for child care personnel, coupled with the low pay and benefits they usually receive, indicates that there will be a continuing influx of totally untrained and inexperienced personnel. These entry level personnel (and this applies equally to undergraduate students in their first practicum experience) are usually conceptually unsophisticated, tend to be driven by warm feelings towards children, tend to gravitate towards particularly needy children and have difficulty setting limits or denying children's requests. (Discipline is their major request when they are asked what kind of inservice training they need.) Such personnel, in their initial practice, also tend to be passive and dependent; seeing all the frustrations of their work as caused by external forces about which they can do nothing. (VanderVen, 1988).

Such persons need an orientation to the field, with a rather narrow focus on their situation and clientele. They need specific training geared to their daily activities, and close supervision as they try new techniques and their roles. They also need the encouragement and sense of being part of a larger scheme of things that comes from being "connected". There are numerous examples in the literature of successful programs of this type at the local level. Two of the side benefits of such programs are that they tend to reduce staff turn-over rates and encourage people to move on to other levels of training.

During Service Training and Education.

Persons in this stage of their professional development are beginning to become concerned with quality teaching. They desire to operate their early childhood environment in a planful and rational way to accomplish specific goals for the children in their charge. As such they recognize a need for understanding child development research and theory and the diversity of usable appropriate practices that may be applied to their situation. They clearly identify themselves as part of the early childhood education community and seek to know its history and traditions. They seek ways to increase their effectiveness and to share their ideas. They wish to be self-reliant. This sense may come as a result of progress through a two or four year educational program, or it may come through extensive work experience. In either case, the important aspects of the training and education to be provided is the blending of theory with practice in a systematic way.

For undergraduates engaged in a four year program this is accomplished through upper-level methods courses and through the typical student teaching experience. For those in the field, it may be successfully accomplished through programs such as CDA (Child Development Associate) training programs (c.f. Peters & Sutton, 1985; Peters & Delner, 1987; Peters, 1988).

Such training and education leads to informed, but not necessarily fully professional, practice. Nor, does it necessarily lead to professional recognition (Peters, 1988).

Professional Education and Credentialing.

It is generally agreed that a professional needs to be a well educated person. The term *professional* is related to an idea that was originally embedded in the concept of the "learned professions." Professions such as law, medicine or the clergy require a high degree of education in the liberal arts and in the sciences. They are directed towards the development of mental capabilities, a range of understandings, and ways of thinking that have carry-over to all walks of life. True professionals have both educational attainments (degrees) and licenses or certifications that establish their privilege to practice based upon their competencies. Together these are the credentials of professional standing. It has been argued that the lack of either or both sets of credentials classifies the practitioner as either a craftsperson or a semi-professional (Spodeck, Saracho & Peters, 1988 b). The traditional four or the newer five year degree programs leading to early childhood teacher certification purport to accomplish professional standing by providing both a strong arts and science educational grounding and advance competencies in professional practice.

Specialist Preparation.

VanderVen's third stage of professional development is often associated with longevity in the field. For many practitioners, after several years or longer in the field, there needs to be a career choice with some elaborating their direct practice with young children, usually along more clinical lines, and others moving their careers towards more indirect services (eg. administration, supervision, curriculum development). In either case, they are ready to assume leadership roles and to serve as professional models for others. As they seek their new roles they recognize a need for new and different skills in areas such as supervision, program planning, administration, financial management and fund raising, or in particular assessment procedures or techniques for working with special children or families. They also seek to enhance their credentials through both advanced degrees and specialty certifications. As the needs of the field grow the need for such persons also grows.

Senior Leadership Preparation.

I have suggested elsewhere (Peters, 1981) that the viability of a profession is dependent on the production of a leadership cadre that can take on the responsibility for a) generating new knowledge, b) organizing and disseminating that knowledge through academic programs, c) setting, assessing, and maintaining standards of professional performance and, d) organizing to unify and advocate for the profession. These are the people that incorporate the best thinking in the field, they are the sponsors of creative ideas, and the store house for the field's wisdom. They are the critics and organizers of, amongst other things, the whole five tier personnel development system.

Again, specialized preparation is recognized and needed, (eg. in research methods, evaluation, policy formation, and the like). So too are appropriate credentials; usually in the form of the doctoral degree.

The Future

None of the suggestions above are new. Indeed, all parts of the five tier system exist, to some degree, throughout the country. What is lacking is unification, modification, and funding commitment. Briefly, let me throw out a few ideas on how these might address one of the most pressing problems we face in staff training: Increasing the number of qualified personnel, particularly minority group members.

The first step here would involve creating a unified effort. By unification I do not mean the creation of a monolithic system. Rather, one that identifies responsibilities for implementation of each of the five tiers, insures the coordination among them, and their comparability across geographical and political boundaries. For example, my experience suggests that local agencies such as community day care systems or Information and Referral Services are in the best position to maintain a system of Inservice Training and Orientation for day care workers including those who work with special needs children. The training "package" they implement may be developed in conjunction with colleges, universities or state regulatory agencies, but these units should not be involved in the continuous delivery of the training. On the other hand, the agencies of delivery should have a clear responsibility for encouraging "good" candidates (and particularly minority candidates) to move forward in their careers through engaging in During Service Training and Education. (Agency personnel who are engaged in such training might well be enrolled in or the products of a tier 4 program.)

For the second step, I would rely heavily on an academic form of the CDA training model. This would, in some cases, require modification of the entrance requirements, course structures, and time schedules of the academic institutions involved in order to permit the free flow of the personnel from tier 1 to tier 2 and allow them to continue their training and education during their employment. Such programs also need to be structured to permit permeable boundaries between tier 2 & 3. The history of CDA training is replete with examples of how this has been accomplished by both large and small institutions of higher education. (Personnel of the colleges and universities involved in the design and evaluation of these programs would include doctoral students--tier 5).

Finally, the Inservice Training, During Service Training and Education components, and the academic study involved in the Professional Education and Credentialing tier, would need to be funded from sources other than trainee tuition. The model initiated and implemented until recently under Head Start CDA and HSST training provided a good example of how this could be done reasonably economically. It certainly increased the quality of performance of Head Start personnel, created a more stable work force within Head Start (in spite of continuing low wages), and provided major new educational opportunities for minorities and others who previously had been educationally disenfranchised.

Similarly, in such a unified system, funding at the base levels, tiers 1, 2 & 3, would need to be sufficient to permit the support of the training

at levels 4 & 5. Again, this can be accomplished by building an appropriate staffing model that ties the resources of the tier 1 agency, and the tier 2-5 university resources together. Figure 2 indicates the rough outlines of such a model. In essence, as the model is carried out the correct proportion of each needed personnel area receives the training needed and the appropriate credentialing.

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NOTES

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Figure 1

Five Tiers of Training and Education

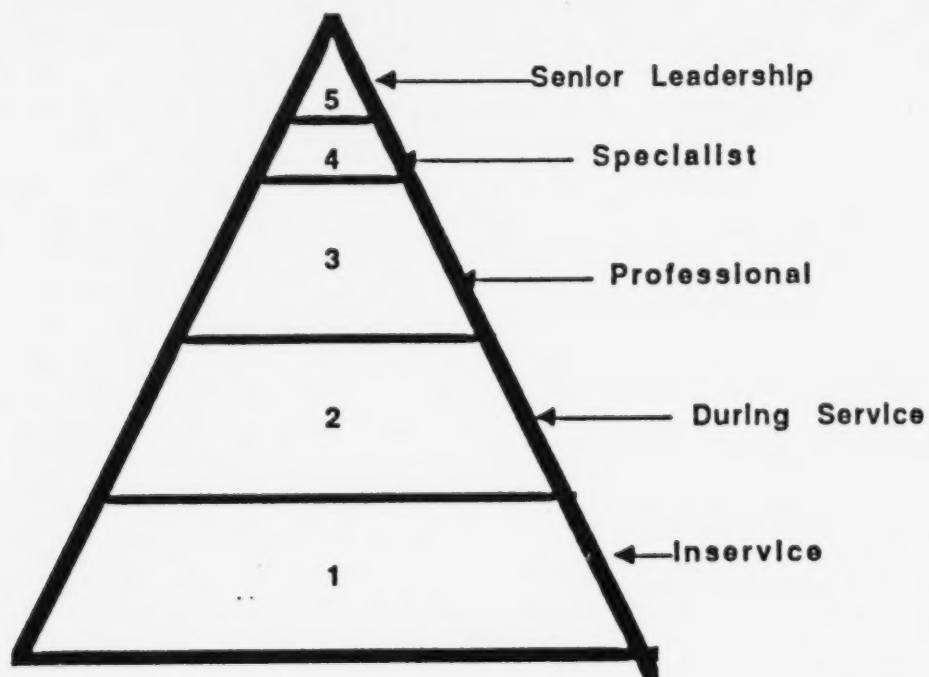


Figure 2

Model of Unified System of Training and Education

